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AN EXPERIMENT WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

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Even under the junior high-school system the difficulty still remains, especially in a small school, of meeting the needs of the individual. For decades we have trained the professional classes fairly successfully in our schools. They have been given a vocational education. Only recently have we awakened to the opportunity of prevocational training for the industrial classes. The child for whom our present school system seems to hold the least is the boy who rebels at the academic studies and revels in the manual arts. His interests lie in machines, in tools, in work with his hands, not in textbooks. It is a matter of but months when he will leave the school entirely.

We have in our school two or three boys who, in spite of all encouragement and prodding in their classroom work, refuse to take an interest in anything except their manual training. Ours is a school with only 75 to the grade, and hence it is impossible for us to have a special class devoted entirely to the industrial or prevocational work. It seemed, however, that such boys should have special attention. They were going into lines of work for which, through the manual-training department, they should be able to receive far more adequate preparation. The principal, in conference with the supervisor of manual training, mapped out a special program for one of the boys who was most in need of it.

Most of his time is to be spent in the shop. His pride and responsibility are fostered by giving him the title of assistant. Around this position as a hub the spokes of his other related work radiate. The shopwork which he does is all objective, to be used within the school as actual contributions to its equipment in one way or another. Twice a week, the first period in the morning, he reports to the high-school mechanical-drawing class. Here, at the same time that he is learning the fundamentals of draughting, he is making the plans for the constructive work in which he will engage during the rest of the week. Every day he attends regular classes in English and arithmetic in the junior high school. It seemed essential that he continue his study along these two most important branches of academic work. One afternoon a week he joins a special class of high-school students who are studying the chemistry of soil under the direction of the science instructor. As soon as weather permits, a practical application will be made with an experimental garden. The rest of the school day, the bulk of his time, is spent in the practical working out of the plans and theories and study from his other classes. Arithmetic is continually applied in problems of measurement, cost, and the like. He is frequently sent to the lumber yard or the hardware store to make a purchase. In this way money values, tables of dimensions, and fractions become really alive to him. Before he goes home at night he must hand in a neatly written, well-spelled, and well-worded report of everything which he has done during the day. This includes the classes he has attended, the plans he has made, the costs he has computed, the material he has purchased, the progress of his manual work—in short, anything which has occupied him during the day. His standing in English is dependent even more upon the writing of this report than upon his regular classroom work in that subject. In the same way his measurements, his cost accounting, etc., are an essential part of his arithmetic. Prompt and regular attendance—the nominal school day—are rigidly insisted upon.

Although the experiment has been in operation too short a time for us to forecast its ultimate outcome, there are, nevertheless, a number of encouraging signs. The problem of discipline which, in his case, troubled us considerably has disappeared entirely. He has accepted his responsibility in the shop, and the supervisor has been able successfully to leave classes of fifth- and sixth-grade boys in his charge. He enjoys the work enough to come early and stay late. This was so evident that within a few days after his start in this special work another boy of much the same temperament came to the principal with an earnest appeal for the same opportunity. The decision was postponed because of the fear that two boys, left together so much to their own devices, would abuse their privileges. When, however, the boy returned the next day with his father, whom he had converted to his plan, it was decided to give him a trial along the same lines as his fellow-student. So far their discipline has been above reproach, and the two are able to do many things together which they could not do alone.

One of their accomplishments is a cabinet for the shop in which are kept the screws, nails, sandpaper, etc. It is well fitted with shelves, drawers, and cupboard space. We find among other articles, completed or planned, such contributions as these: trays for inkwells for teachers' desks, holders for pencils for primary rooms, extra shelves for teachers' closets, bulletin boards, bookcases, coat-trees, tables, and floors. If I wanted a man to do a handy job for me, there is no one I should prefer to one of these boys.

So far the solution of their problem has been exceedingly encouraging. We can accommodate more pupils as fast as we can assimilate them into the right kind of manlike responsibility when not under surveillance. In our town the number would not be large and the work would of necessity be of this special type. This attempt has not cost us a cent, and but little extra time, every minute of which we feel well worth the effort. Men in the true meaning of the word are being made. The probability is that these boys will stay longer under the supervision of the school than they would otherwise. They are raising the *morale* and *esprit de corps* of the student body, not lowering it, as they have done in the past, and, on the whole, both the individuals and the school at large have been benefited.